

Message Text

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APPROVED BY: SCI/ EN: WCSALMON

EA/ VN: LASKEW (PHONE)

EA/ J: RDANKERT (PHONE)

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TO AMEMBASSY TOKYO

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LIMDIS

FOLLOWING REPEAT SAIGON 7499 ACTION SECSTATE, APRIL 30 TH:

QUOTE

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E. O. 11652: N/ A

TAGS: TGEN EFIS MILI BEXP VS

SUBJECT: HERBICIDES: ALLEGED POISONING OF VN SEAFOOD PRODUCTS BY
DIOXIN.

BEGIN SUMMARY. NOTED GVN SCIENTIST HAS DISCUSSED HARVARD
RESEARCH REPORT ALLEGING POISONOUS RESIDUES OF DIOXIN FROM
HERBICIDE DEFOLIANTS IN SHRIMP AND OTHER SEAFOOD. NEWSMEN
ATTRIBUTE HOLD UP OF EXPORT SHIPMENT TO JAPAN TO DIOXIN SCARE;
STORY ALSO WORRYING SEAFOOD INDUSTRY; CURRENTLY MOST IMPORTANT
EXPORT POTENTIAL. ACTION REQUESTED:
INFORMATION REQUESTED REGARDING ALLEGED HARVARD STUDY;
EMBASSY DESIRES GUIDANCE FOR RESPONDING TO QUERIES, HOPEFULLY
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SUFFICIENT TO REBUT FEARS AND KILL THE STORY. END SUMMARY.

1. PROFESSOR PHAM HOANG HO, DISTINGUISHED AGRICULTURAL SCIENTIST AND VIETNAMESE ASSOCIATE OF NAS HERBICIDE COMMITTEE IS QUOTED IN VIETNAMESE PRESS ANNOUNCING HARVARD RESEARCH STUDY DISCLOSED THAT MANY SEAFOOD PRODUCTS BOUGHT IN VUNG TAU IN 1970 CONTAIN A DANGEROUS LEVEL OF DIOXIN, A VERY POISONOUS SUBSTANCE CONTAINED IN "ORANGE" HERBICIDE. ALTHOUGH HO CAUTIONS THAT DIOXIN LEVELS WERE VERY LOW AND THAT POISON MAY NOT PERSIST IN CURRENT SEAFOOD PRODUCTS HE TOLD THE PRESS THAT "WE SHOULD BE AFRAID THAT HIS WOULD ROCK OUR SEAFOOD EXPORTS."

2. STORY SURFACED AT VIETNAMESE MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION EXPORT SEMINAR LAST WEEK AS DANGER TO SEAFOOD INDUSTRY. UPI HAS A PIECE OF THE STORY ALLEGING TO EMBOFF THAT 24 TON SEAFOOD SHIPMENT HAS BEEN HELD UP IN JAPAN BECAUSE OF FEAR OF CONTAMINATION BY HERBICIDE CHEMICALS; WE HAVE NO CONFIRMATION THAT SHIPMENT ACTUALLY DELAYED BECAUSE OF DIOXIN SCARE. ONE AMERICAN BUSINESSMAN INVESTING IN SHRIMP INDUSTRY TOLD COMMA "IF THIS IS TRUE IT WILL RUIN ME." SEAFOOD IS CURRENTLY SVN'S MOST IMPORTANT EXPORT ITEM AND SUBJECT OF CONSIDERABLE INVESTMENT.

3. EMBASSY IS CONCERNED THAT STORY WILL GAIN CREDENCE, REGARDLESS OF THE FACTS IN THE CASE. HO HAS APPARENTLY PROPOSED SUBMISSION OF ADDITIONAL CURRENT SAMPLES TO HARVARD FOR TESTING BUT WE DOUBT THAT WOULD PRODUCE QUICK ENOUGH REASSURANCE TO KILL THE STORY PARTICULARLY IF THE ALLEGATION STEMS FROM THE AAAS HERBICIDE ASSESSMENT COMMISSION HEADED BY PROFESSOR MESELSON OF HARVARD.

4. ACTION REQUESTED:

A) IN HOPES OF CLARIFYING THE TRUE SITUATION AND BEING ABLE TO RESPOND TO QUERIES EMBASSY REQUESTS BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON ANY RESULTS OF SEAFOOD TESTING WHICH MAY HAVE BEEN ANNOUNCED BY HARVARD, AAAS, DR MESELSON OR OTHER REPUTABLE RESEARCH GROUPS TOGETHER WITH COMMENTARY. IF WASHINGTON AGENCIES CAN SUGGEST MATERIAL TO USE ALSO WITH PRESS WHICH MIGHT KILL THE STORY, IT WOULD BE WELCOME.

B) IT IS SUGGESTED THAT DR LANG OR DR ROSS OF NAS HERBICIDE COMMITTEE MAY WISH TO ADVISE PROFESSOR HO DIRECTLY REGARDING THE CREDIBILITY OF THE HARVARD RESEARCH STUDY AND DISCUSSION OF IT WITH THE PRESS WHILE THE NAS COMMITTEE IS STILL LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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WORKING ON ITS DRAFT REPORT.

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